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ABSTRACT

Whole language may be described as authentic and purposeful experiences with language in a child's natural environment--it is a philosophy that combines all content area subjects into a meaningful process. The teaching of whole language over the entire spectrum of the curriculum was observed in the Catholic Primary Schools of the Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia. Each school promoted learning through its own strategies pertinent to the needs of the student. Classrooms were curious, imaginative places that challenged the children. Teachers needed to be well prepared because groups of children were often involved in a variety of activities. Classroom observations indicated that children did not need to be "spoon fed" but that they could actively participate in learning activities. Instruments of evaluation through the school visits were usually informal such as teacher observation, journal writing, visual materials, written projects, and research participation through performance. In general, classroom teachers feel that whole language: (1) enriches learning in the classroom and the teaching/learning process; (2) gives children the freedom to explore for themselves; (3) makes connections with oral, written, and reading comprehension; (4) encourages children to look at literature in depth; and (5) uses all modes of communication in an integrating manner stressing language as a whole. (Contains eight references.) (RS)

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ED 372 370

Sr. Margaret Flynn

WHOLE LANGUAGE - HOW & WHY

Whole Language may be described as authentic and purposeful experiences with language in a child's natural environment. This article explores various aspects of Whole Language, including definitions from specialists, the author's own beliefs and description of a whole language curriculum used in Australia. The concluding part of the article includes data submitted by teachers from schools throughout the United States.

Whole Language is a philosophy that combines all content areas subjects into a meaningful process. Results are very apparent because fragmentation has been eliminated, and literacy learning has begun through the "whole approach."

This process have convinced educators how important whole language is and the value it has in the field of education. If there is to be success in this type of teaching the teachers must be well prepared, have managerial skills to meet the needs of the groups, and have a supportive, non-threatening environment. New teachers must seek the aid of master teachers.

Another important point is constant involvement by the students. The teacher must be aware of all that is happening in the classroom; otherwise true teaching and learning are not being accomplished. Whole Language doesn't just happen but involves effective planning and organization. Although difficult to define, Whole Language happens with real reading, real writing, real speaking and listening, as opposed to exercises stressing skills.

According to Altwerger, et. al., Whole Language is rooted in the philosophies of Commenius, Dewey, Parkes, and other theorists, who advocated a holistic view of education in which children are active participants in an integrated curriculum. Don Holdaway in New Zealand, states that children learn to speak from a burning desire to communicate with those around them and is acquired through a developmental process. Other experts insist that Whole Language refers to the use of natural and authentic learning.

By its very nature, Whole Language integrates the language arts with such areas as art, music, math, social studies, and science.

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Specifically, the overall goal of the educational policy in the Catholic Diocese of New South Wales is to provide young people with an education that has broad and balanced quality, and one on which there is relevance for religious, social and economic challenges. The primary curriculum consists of six Key Learning Areas: English, Mathematics, Science and Practical Art, Health and Physical Science. These categories insure appropriate continuity from the Primary School through Secondary School. The diocese hopes to enable all students to achieve high standards of learning which develop their talents and capacities to full potential. The diocese want the children learn about the world and to participate as active and informed Australians. Changes brought a holistic approach to education rather than fragmentation. The diocese stresses total development of children through education in faith toward commitment to Jesus Christ.

The author's purpose in visiting Catholic Primary Schools of the Archdiocese of Sydney was to observe the teaching of Whole Language over the entire spectrum of the curriculum. The writer hoped to see listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, enveloped into an environment where children work together through the "top-down process." In this type of teaching the whole school system has to support the curriculum, if it is to meet success from Kindergarten through Year Six. According to Frank Finnessy:

> Whole Language is an informal understanding of the way to do things in school. We expect to see different things happening in Whole Language Schools, than in schools using other approaches.

The writer had many reservations regarding "Whole Language". In the actual classroom visits many concepts have been clarified. Each school promoted learning through its own strategies pertinent to the needs of the students. It was quite evident that the children were learning and enjoying the process through proficient use of language.

In the past language was fragmented in many institutions of learning and there were complicated and artificial learning situations that were not helpful to students. The inclusion of reading, note taking, discussion, summarizing and generalizing are strategies common to all subject areas. Whole Language weaves together all subject areas from oral reading, writing, story telling and other language activities. The author's reaction to the visits was that the school environments were not dull and boring but reflected curious, imaginative places in which children were being challenged. The responsibility for success involves both teacher and student. As one teacher observes:

> In a Whole Language classroom, teachers and children value and appreciate each other as friends and coworkers who strive toward the same goals.

Visits provided active participation by the children which enhanced the teaching and learning process. The teacher usually reads a story to the children, the students read the story orally and the class was given opportunities for assessment, other than written assignments. Vocabulary was presented and various activities in which the children could explain and discover other stories with a similar theme. This type of teaching required the teacher to be well prepared because groups of children are involved in a variety of activities. Besides individual and team work the whole class participated as a large group.

A kindergarten classroom had a variety of drawing geared to number concepts. In the math class the children are able to respond to the pictures displayed on the bulletin board because they have not seen them in a sequential manner. The colors, concrete concepts and abstract numbers added to the quality of the lesson.

In a composite class there were major themes such as Growing and Changing is God's Gift to Me -- My Life. In this type of classroom the teacher listens more to the child and does not do all the talking. A conference is held to help children value what they know.

The contract method gives the child a chance to do various activities pertaining to a story that has been read. It incorporates drawing, description, handwriting, and comprehension on various levels. Each contract has activities that pertains to the story. In this type of work the children can vary their work.

Just as there are many flowers in the world, many sports to play, and many children to learn there are many ways to teach Whole Language. This type of teaching can be beneficial to children with varying potential; they all feel they are accomplishing something worthwhile. Whole Language is not stilted but a combination of reading, language, experiences, use of learning centers, and integration of content areas. The writer believes that literature focuses on the practical issues through the application of good books for children. The teacher is the key to make this type of teaching a success.

Observations of the students made the author realize that children need not be "spoon fed" but that they can research and write own summarizations. It was fascinating to see the 3rd grade level participate in such an important part of geography.

Evaluation in any classroom involves both the teacher and the students. Too often written tests seem to be the only criterion to see if the lesson has been successfully taught. Informal evaluation can meet the needs of the group through observation, group work, oral and silent reading, contracts, and learning centers. Effective assessment covers strategies and procedures that are useful in the classroom, and positive feedback can be given rather than negative criticism.

Another part of this assessment focuses on individual performance not the class as a whole. Through reading the child's journal, individual work, and conferences the teacher knows where the child is at the present time, and where he/she is going in the future. As the reader can see this is a day by day process which has more validity than a written test, because this method constitutes a strategy on particular phase of work.

In the math class display, rote learning was not encouraged, but visual interpretation for numerals was reinforced by utilizing a combination of concrete and abstract symbols. From the display there were opportunities to work on an individual basis using number combinations and materials.

Instruments of evaluation throughout the school visits were usually informal such as teacher observation, journal writing, visual materials, written projects, research participation through performance. Evaluation varies from the primary level to the intermediate level. Concrete experiences are needed for your children, while a more sophisticated evaluation can be a part of the upper grades, both meet with success.

How does Whole Language enrich the teaching/learning instruction in the field of education? Let's look at what classroom teachers say:

1. Whole Language enriches learning in the classroom. The activities make it more enjoyable and as a result, the children look forward to schoolwork.

2. Enriches teaching/learning process. Motivation is a key factor, and the process can be individual or group oriented.

3. One of the more positive effects of Whole Language is the community feeling that comes from working together. Children are not isolated based on abilities but are encouraged to work together.

4. Whole Language gives children freedom to explore for themselves. Independence and self discovery are also factors.

5. Whole Language makes a connection with written, oral, and reading comprehension.

6. Integration of concepts rather than segregation makes sense to children.

7. Whole Language is child centered . Social and personal differences reflect ethnic diversity. Teaches students as integration of reading, writing, and speaking.

8. Use of Whole Language with seventh and eighth graders taught through novels in the Social Studies Curriculum is most rewarding.

9. Whole Language has encouraged the children to look at literature in depth. It has urged the children to think imaginatively and creatively in literature. Hopefully, it will create a new generation of problem solvers and creative writers.

10. With Whole Language the child uses all modes of communication in an integrating manner stressing language as whole and not isolating parts. Lessons are based on our greatest expressive outlet, literature. If the child participates in Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking experiences, their acquisition of language and skills advances naturally.

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